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ABSTRACT

Plans for building a lower secondary school, the Kuokkala project, in Jyvaskyla, Finland, are described in this paper. The first part describes the background of the project, an experimental school developed in conjunction with the school head and university researchers. The second part discusses ways in which the modern school ensures students' individual learning opportunities, and the third part identifies seven structural principles of a modern school. Pedagogical characteristics of the modern school, which focus on a new concept of learning, recognize the individual learner's autonomy and responsibility for learning. The responsibilities of school leaders in a modern school are discussed in the final part, which asserts that the school leader plays a crucial role in influencing the school culture. Stages of a staff training process are described. A site drawing is included. (LMI)

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MODERN FACILITIES AND SUPPORTIVE MANAGEMENT AS TOOLS FOR DEVELOPING SCHOOLS

The Kuokkala school project
City of Jyväskylä, Finland

by
Sauli Rask

In the Kuokkala lower secondary school project the main aim has been to plan and construct "a school for the future" both in terms of facilities and equipment. The pedagogical aim has been to develop a good environment for students' self-directed learning using modern facilities of information technology. The management of the school in the context of effectiveness will demand modern and supportive attitude from the leader.

The University of Jyväskylä has contributed substantially to the planning process. It will also continue to have close co-operation with the school. - The school will start in 1994.

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THE FINNISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

Finland had parallel school system until the 1970's. In the beginning of that decade Finland introduced a coprehensive school system. The administration was very centrallized for ten years. During the 1980's we have step by step moved to a more decentralized system. Schools in Finland will have considerable freedom in organizing their work. At the moment there is a growing trend towards site-based management of schools. The main administrative philosophy is "management by results".

The state supports the schools financially covering approximately 70 % of all their operation costs. The municipalities are responsible for the rest.

1) THE BACKGROUND OF THE KUOKKALA SCHOOL PROJECT

In spring 1989 the city of Jyväskylä was planning a new lower secondary school for the new Kuokkala residential area. The School Board had earlier decided that the school should specialize in experimental and research-based school development. One of the reasons leading to that decision was the fact that Jyväskylä is a well-known school-town in Finland. It is the capital of the Province of Central Finland. Jyväskylä is also the home of the first Teacher Training College in the country. The college was founded in 1863 and constituted the basis for the present University of Jyväskylä, which has always had an active interest in education and educational research.

The idea for the experimental school was developed in co-operation with the author of this article and some researchers at the Institute for Educational Research, a unit of the University of Jyväskylä. The institute is one of the most important research centers for learning and teaching in the Nordic Countries.

In May 1989 I was elected head of the school for the construction period. This has meant that I have been able to take part in the planning of the school as an educational expert on a full-time basis. Cooperation with the architect, Mr Kauko Lahti, and many others involved in the planning continued for more than two and a half years. The planning phase ended in January 1992.

In addition to using planning experts, the development of the Kuokkala lower secondary school has also involved specialists in landscape design, acoustics and audio-visual aids. In the pedagogical planning there has been two main planning groups concentrating on the construction and on the experimental function of the school. In the latter group we have had three researchers from the Institute for Educational Research. In addition to this, we have had 14 experts representing different school subjects.

In the context of delegation of decision-making it has been a very challenging job for me to be able to plan a modern school in our town. After almost 18 years as a principal of a lower secondary school I have been responsible for the pedagogical expertise in the planning for more than two and a half years time with a full salary. The work has been beset by many difficulties because of the period of economic depession.

2) WHAT DOES A MODERN SCHOOL LOOK LIKE ?

Against this background, the question of a modern school has become a very crucial one for me. I have made an effort to familiarize myself with scientific articles about the topic. I have also had extensive discussions with the representatives of the University of Jyväskylä as well as with other university people. One of the advisors has also been Jouni Kuusisto who is conducting a follow-up study on the Kuokkala project. The two IMTEC conferences (Hyvinkää, Finland and Oxford, UK) have also given many good ideas for me.

I am strongly convinced that we do not need more military-looking barracks as schools. The school must be a working place where pupils, teachers and other repsesentatives of the faculty like to work. That means a modern, pleasant, functional and beautiful environment where, for instance, landscaping with plants and structures are meaningfully combined with the other physical and architectural factors and together make a functional and agreeable whole. The concept of "modernity" is mainly connected with the standard of information technology (IT) in the school. The equipment of IT must have a standard that as well as possible resembles that of modern world of work.

The most important factor is that a modern school should ensure, better than today, students' individual learning opportunities in the way it organizes learning and teaching.

3) THE STRUCTURAL PRINCIPLES OF A MODERN SCHOOL

In the Kuokkala school project, together with the chief architec, Mr Kauko Lahti, we have agreed that the following principles for design are important:

1) easiness to visualize the building,
2) the functionality of the school
3) flexibility and adaptability
4) impact on the motivation of students
5) excellent natural lighting
6) security
7) anticipation of future needs

4) SOME PEDAGOGICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A SCHOOL FOR THE FUTURE

In Finland, as well as in many other countries we now speak very much about a new concept of knowledge and a new concept of learning. The latter means especially the cognitive concept of learning which stresses an individual learners' autonomy and responsibility for their own learning and also for their skills to process information. This was also the main message in IMTEC's last international conference in Oxford. The role of the learner was very central in almost every lecture I attended.

In the planning of the Kuokkala lower secondary school we have tried to "translate" the pedagogical ideas into the language of construction in the way described above. It has also meant that we have been seeking to identify characteristics of a school for the future. In this project we have had the following visions:

1) School subjects have lost some of their justification as valuable contributors to education per se, and have developed more into educational resources and means for-fostering pupils' individual growth.

2) Traditional classroom work has been increasingly transformed into an open learning environment.

3) Pupils' autonomy and their responsibility for their own learning has led to more autonomous learning.

4) Computer-based learning alone and in small groups has become a frequent working method in schools.

5) International contacts between schools, teachers and pupils are regular.

6) School buildings offer a comfortable and technically flexible environment for learning.

7) The schedule for studies allows more flexible and more varied working methods than schools today do.

8) Both teachers and information technology serve as resources and guides for pupils' learning.

9) In addition to many-sided internal development, ecological conciderations are not only highlighted in the school's teaching program but development of ecological awareness is also built into the school's everyday activity.

5) SUPPORTIVE MANAGEMENT IN A MODERN SCHOOL

The role of a school leader is very important also in a school for the future. School leaders must be aware of the

new trends in education. They must have good leadership skills in addition to organization and management skills. They must try to encourage teachers to develop a new attitude in their work. According to the cognitive concept of learning that means, for instance, more degrees of freedom to pupils in their efforts to acquire knowledge.

One of the best means for shool development is experimentation. Especially in university towns the principal should actively seek cooperation with researchers.

The school must be active in trying to develop pupils' opportunities to learn. That means that teachers need to take a special interest in alternative learning strategies. The teaching-learning process needs to be student-centered. The new technology must be in optimal use.

In a modern expert organization the leader's role is to direct and support the activities of the members of the organisation so that the aims will be achieved. That presupposes that the leader has skills to get people work towards the goals. The leader has to be prepared to accept a broad range of activities if they are directed towards the main goal.

In a modern school the leader must be open to divergent and unusual ideas and suggestions because an indispensable condition of development is change. Not all change is automatically development, improvement. Change can also lead to a decline. - In modern management and leadership risks are unavoidable.

The supportiveness of a modern school leader implies, for example, that the leader is active and interested in the achievements of people and also in life as a whole. He or she must care about the facilities in school, their functionality, the furniture, colours and so on; in fact everything that is affecting the learning environment and the culture of the school.

The heads of a modern school must create a motivating culture in the organisation. They must be skillful and competent, but not so skillful that people do not like to be their subordinates. They have to foster every single effort of that a teacher makes towards getting better results in learning. That requires both leadership skills and efforts to make up an environment where teachers and pupils have good opportunities to make progress. The school has many-sided and modern facilities to use. The school operates close to the technological standard of the workplace. Today this means, for instance, possibilities to sound and video-editing, many-sided use of computers, telecommunication and interest in multimedia.

In Finland we are just now having intensive discussion about the educational outcomes of schools. Evaluating the effectiveness of the educational system is increasingly considered important.

We speak about "management by results". It means that schools are expected to "publicly" assess their prevailing situation, choose their evelopment aims, plan the strategies for achieving the aims and decide upon the means to evaluate their success.

In the City of Jyväskylä the school office has organized carefully planned training on "Effective schooling". A total of 700 principals, teachers and other faculty members were trained at a training center on a two day course during one and a half years time. The training concentrated on the philosophy and concepts of the "management by results". It consisted of the following phases:

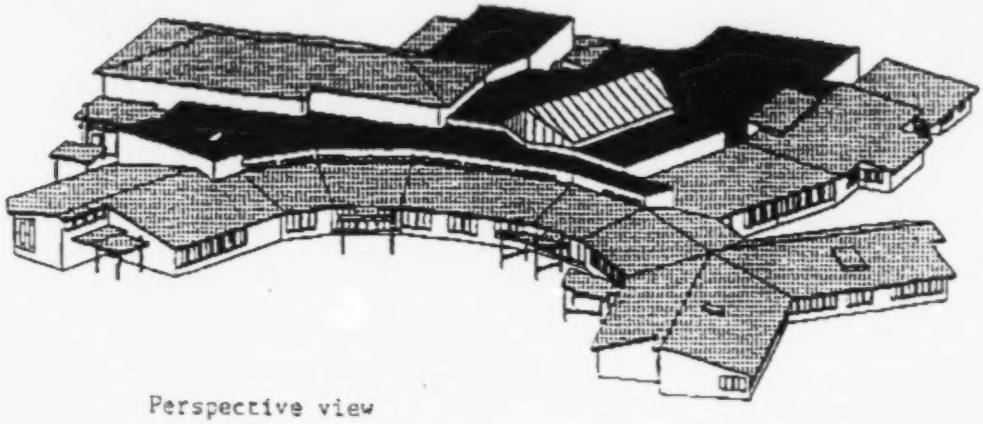
1) The training of trainers (principals, civil servants, teachers)
2) A two day seminar for principals
3) A two day training for the whole faculty of schools (as mentioned above). During this phase the school staff made a SWOT-analysis about their schools (strenghts, weaknesses, opportunities, threats)
4) In schools the staff discussed the results of SWOT leading to conclusions about the situation.
5) The schools have specified the "key-areas" for the forthcoming school year. They have also defined the aims and subsidiary aims in the key areas
6) Principals have conducted management-staff discussions in schools
7) Schools and school office will together agree upon the financial resources for the achieving the aims of schools. There will be a small financial resource for those development plans that are closest the main interests of the school board.

As a result of the above, the next step will be the planning of school-based curriculums. - In Finland we will still have a state-wide core curriculum, bu the schools will have considerable freedom in their own adaptations.

The systematic training of school leaders in the City of Jyväskylä has a history of almost 17 years. Because of the new concept of "management by results" the training will have new emphasis. Increasingly important are going to be leadership skills, knowledge of financial questions and information activities. A new form of in-service training of principals will be peer tutoring.

The leader of a school of today must be genuinely democratic and open-minded. He must trust his faculty and support their work in many visible ways towards a goal where better learning and the needs of learners are of special interest to everyone.

THE KUOKKALA LOWER SECONDARY SCHOOL
CITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND



Perspective view

Ground floor